(b) Casualty figure is large though it is difficult to arrive at the exact figure.

(c) and (d) India has consistently supported peaceful resolution of the civil war in these countries and has supported international efforts to bring peace to these countries.

Visit of Pakistani delegation

2632. SHRI NANA DESHMUKH: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state :

(a) whether a recent Pakistani delegation, the largest ever business delegation, has *inter alia* urged to ease visa norms on the plea that such a policy would flourish the trade between the two countries;

(b) if so, what are their main demands;

(c) Government's reaction thereon; and

(d) whether Pakistan Government is also expected to reciprocate our gesture?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI DIGVIJAY SINGH): (a) and (b) A delegation from Federation of Pakistan Chamber of Commerce and Industry visited India (July 7-8) at the invitation of Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI). The Joint recommendations, arrived after their meeting, *inter alia* identified easing of visa facility for businessmen of India and Pakistan, enlargement of scope of goods and services traded, and restoration of transport and communication links, as the factors for promotion of trade and commerce between the two countries.

(c) Government is committed to greater economic and trade relations between the two countries. Prime Minister had, in his statement in Parliament on May 2, emphasized on importance of economic cooperation which could create conducive atmosphere for addressing more difficult issues between the two countries.

There is no restriction on grant of visas to Pakistani nationals, including businessmen, who are found eligible, and visas are normally granted after pre-verification.

(d) Pakistan Government continues to follow Restrictive Trade Practices with India. Moreover, contrary to its obligations, including under the WTO, Pakistan has not yet extended MFN treatment to India.

Oil for food scheme

†2633. SHRIMATI MAYA SINGH: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state :

(a) whether it is a fact that Government are considering Iraq for "Oil for food" programme sponsored by the U.N.O.;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) the progress made so far?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI VINOD KHANNA): (a) to (c) Under the United Nation's Oil for Food Programme, a number of Indian companies had won contracts amounting to $1.1 billion approximately, between 1996-2002. After the war in Iraq, the Oil for Food Programme was extended initially for a period of 45 days under UN Security Council Resolution 1472 and subsequently for a further period of six months under UN Security Council Resolution 1483 for approved and prioritized contracts. The programme expires on November 20, 2003. Prioritization by the UN is an ongoing process and, under Resolution 1483, 56 contracts won by Indian companies, of a total value of approx. $275 million, have been prioritized as of July 2003 and are under various stages of implementation.

Regarding Indo-South Africa cooperation

2634. SHRI SATISH PRADHAN: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state :

(a) whether talks were held recently between India and South Africa for strengthening bilateral economic co-operation; and

(b) if so, the details thereof alongwith the details of agreement signed between the two countries?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI DIGVIJAY SINGH): (a) Yes.

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.